Poems and Primary Sources

The Children's Hour, 1859

Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
Descending the broad hall stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence:
Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
A sudden raid from the hall!
By three doors left unguarded
They enter my castle wall!

They climb up into my turret
O'er the arms and back of my chair;
If I try to escape, they surround me;
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine!

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old mustache as I am
Is not a match for you all!

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart.

And there will I keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away!

Thomas B. Read, 1859

Alice, Annie Allegra, and Edith

Henry and Fanny had four daughters. Fanny, the first born daughter, died when she was fifteen months old. Alice, Edith and Annie were a great source of inspiration to Mr. Longfellow. He wrote a poem called *The Children's Hour* about the three girls.

"It is Sunday afternoon. You know, then, how the old house looks, - the shadow in the library, and the sunshine in the study, where I stand at my desk and write you this. Two little girls are playing about the room, - Alice counting with great noise the brass handles on my secretary, 'nine, eight, five, one,' Edith insisting upon having some paper box, long promised but never found, and informing me I am not a man of my word!"

Henry Longfellow, January 30, 1859
(from a note to a friend)

Edith and Annie
Longfellow, 1859

Alice Longfellow, 1859

"Alice has just had her seventh birthday and is the best and brightest of little girls, a great pet of her papa's. Edi, though lovely as an angel, is rather obstinate and wilful [sic], but so caressing and sweet all are drawn to her, and Annie is the sweetest little thing you ever saw. I carry her round the library and ask her the names of the busts. She says, Homer, Sophocles, etc. with amusing correctness, and is very eager to learn."

Fanny Longfellow, September 29, 1857
(from her journal)

from To a Child, 1845

Written for Charley Longfellow.

...Through these once solitary halls
Thy pattering footstep falls.
The sound of thy merry voice
Makes the old walls
Jubilant, and they rejoice
With the joy of thy young heart,
O'er the light of whose gladness
No shadows of sadness
From the somber background of memory start.

Once, ah, once, within these walls,
One whom memory oft recalls,
The Father of his Country, dwelt.
And yonder meadows broad and damp
The fires of the besieging camp
Encircled with a burning belt.
Up and down these echoing stairs,
Heavy with the weight of cares,
Sounded his majestic tread;
Yes, within this very room
Sat he in those hours of gloom,
Weary both in heart and head...

The Castle-Builder, 1848

Written for Erny Longfellow.

A gentle boy, with soft and silken locks,
A dreamy boy, with brown and tender eyes,
A castle-builder, with his wooden blocks,
And towers that touch imaginary skies.

A fearless rider on his father's knee,
An eager listener unto stories told
At the Round Table of the nursery,
Of heroes and adventures manifold.

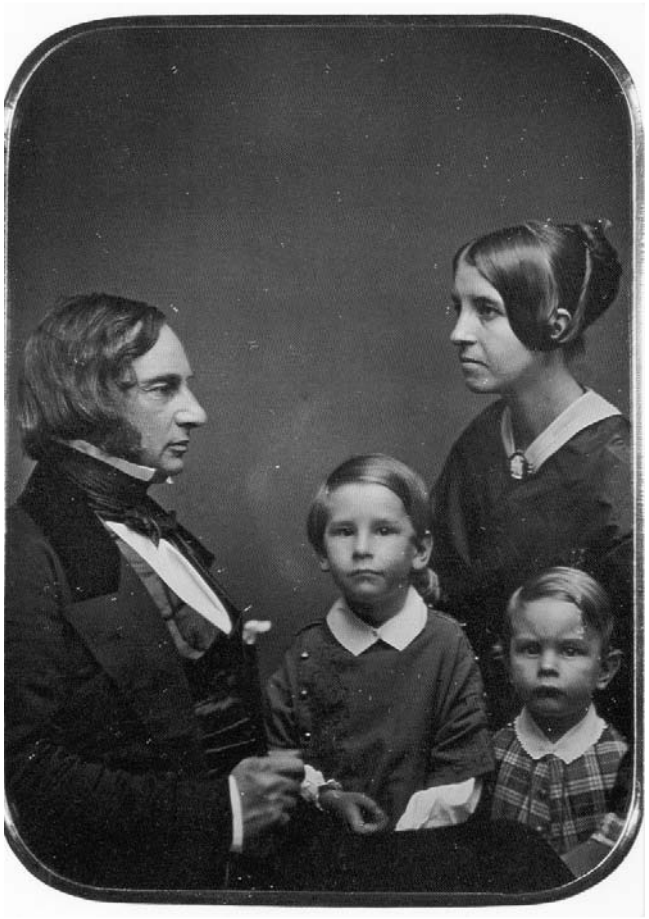
There will be other towers for thee to build;
There will be other steeds for thee to ride;
There will be other legends, and all filled
With greater marvels and more glorified.

Build on, and make thy castles high and fair,
Rising and reaching upward to the skies;
Listen to voices in the upper air,
Nor lose thy simple faith in mysteries.

Charles and Ernest Longfellow

Charley and Erny were the Longfellow's two oldest children. In a journal entry from 1848, Fanny Longfellow wrote *"Erny promises to be the poet, Charley the man of action."* Erny did, in fact, pursue a career in the arts; he grew up to be a painter. As for Charley, he ran away to be a soldier in the Civil War and later became a world traveler.

Charles and Ernest Longfellow, c. 1849



Henry, Charley, Erny, & Fanny Longfellow, 1849

"Nursery floor covered with architectureal [sic] elevations. Charley can construct great steps very accurately. Erny takes a little book, & reads scraps of lines he remembers. "Bon Jour mama"! he said Friday. Very riotous both at dinner, overflowing with fun."

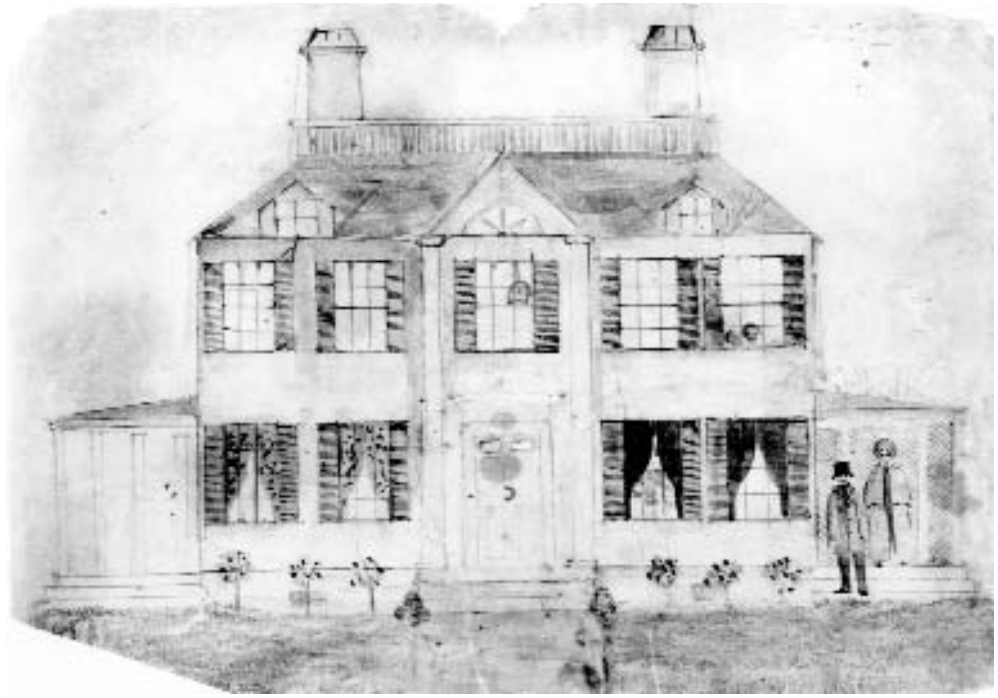
Fanny Longfellow, 1849 (from her journal)

"In town. Bought two velocipedes for the boys, who made a great noise with them in the evening, riding them through the hall by gas-light. Saturday is a bad day to buy playthings for children: They want a day before them to take off the first keen edge of delight."

Henry Longfellow, 1853 (from his journal)

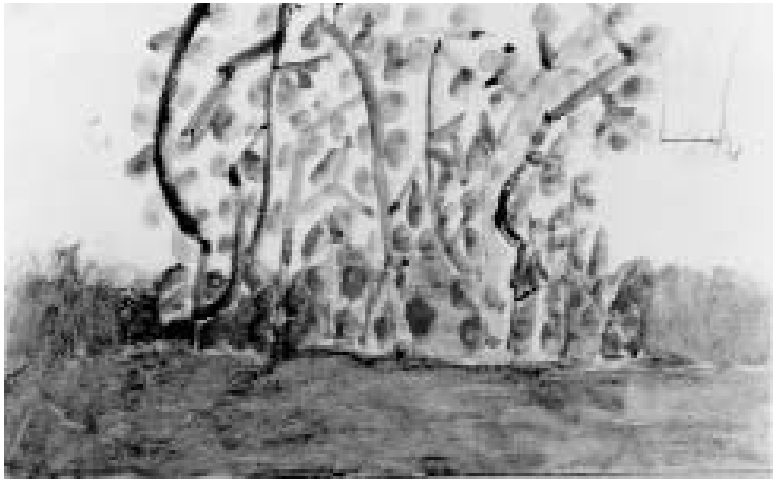
Drawings and Paintings by the Longfellow Children

Henry and Fanny Longfellow believed artistic expression to be an essential part of being human, and art to be one of the most important ways that people communicate. They strongly supported and encouraged their children's artistic expression.

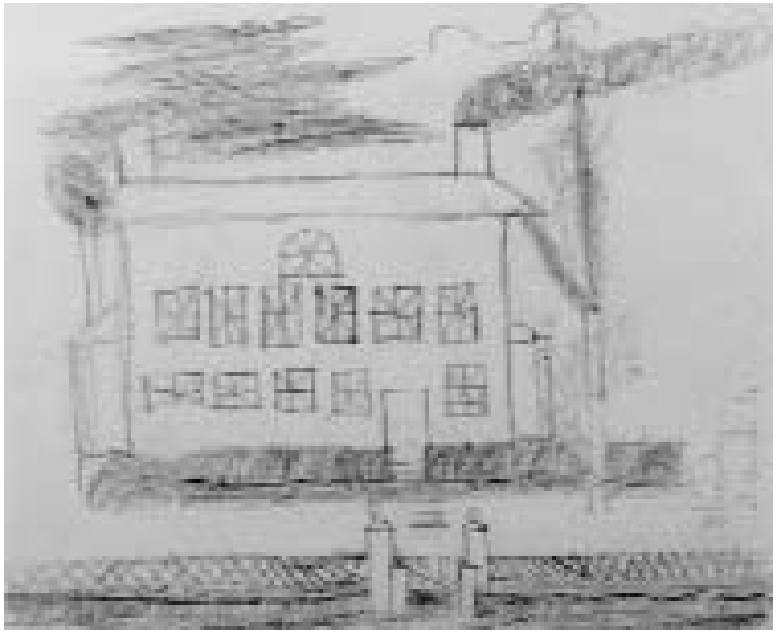


Watercolor painting of the house. Erny Longfellow, 1858. Age 13.

Pencil drawing of view from the front door of Craigie House. Edith Longfellow, 1859. Age 6.



Watercolor painting of lilacs in laundry yard. Edith Longfellow, 1860. Age 7.



Pencil drawing of the house. Charley Longfellow. Age unknown.

Pencil drawing of the view to the Charles River from the house. Erny Longfellow, 1855. Age 10.

Pencil drawing of the house. Erny Longfellow, 1855. Age 10.

The Village Blacksmith, 1839

On his daily walk down Brattle Street, Henry Longfellow would pass by the shop of the village blacksmith, Dexter Pratt.

Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar.
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling, - rejoicing, - sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou has taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

The Village Blacksmith, illustrated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1840

From my Arm-Chair, 1879

"To the Children of Cambridge
Who presented to me, on my seventy-second birthday, February 27, 1879, this chair made from the wood of the village blacksmith's chestnut tree."

Am I a king, that I should call my own
This splendid ebon throne?
Or by what reason, or what right divine,
Can I proclaim it mine?

Only, perhaps, by right divine of song
It may to me belong;
Only because the spreading chestnut tree
Of old was sung by me.

Well I remember it in all its prime,
When in the summer-time
The affluent foliage of its branches made
A cavern of cool shade.

There, by the blacksmith's forge, beside the street,
Its blossoms white and sweet
Enticed the bees, until it seemed alive,
And murmured like a hive.

And when the winds of autumn, with a shout,
Tossed its great arms about,
The shining chestnuts, bursting from the sheath,
Dropped to the ground beneath.

And now some fragments of its branches bare,
Shaped as a stately chair,
Have by my hearthstone found a home at last,
And whisper of the past.

The Danish king could not in all his pride
Repel the ocean tide,
But, seated in this chair, I can rhyme
Roll back the tide of Time.

I see again, as one in vision sees,
The blossoms and the bees,
And hear the children's voices shout and call,
And the brown chestnuts fall.

I see the smithy with its fires aglow,
I hear the bellows blow,
And the shrill hammers on the anvil beat
The iron white with heat!

And thus, dear children, have ye made for me
This day a jubilee,
And to my more than threescore years and ten
Brought back my youth again.

The heart hath its own memory, like the mind,
And in it are enshrined
The precious keepsakes, into which is wrought
The giver's loving thought.

Only your love and your remembrance could
Give life to this dead wood,
And make these branches, leafless now so long,
Blossom again in song.

"Professor Longfellow's Birthday"

"...it occupies a place of honor at the poet's fireside...The upholstering of the arms and the cushion are in green leather. The castors are glass balls set in sockets..."

newspaper clipping from "Craigie House" booklet, 1879